

CLAIRETTE

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BACKGROUND

Clairette (klair-ETT) is an old white variety from the south of France, known since the late 16th century. It is planted in many regions in the south of France where it may be used as a sole variety in AOCs such as Coteaux de Die and Clairette de Languedoc. It is also used as a blender, for example in Chateauneuf du Pape, Cotes du Rhone, Provence and Languedoc. White Chateauneuf du Pape may be half Grenache Blanc and half Clairette. Synonyms include Blanquette, Blanc Lafite, Claret, Clarette, Kleret, Muscade and Osianka. Blanquette was formerly used as a synonym of Clairette in New South Wales. Picapoll Blanco in Catalonia (Spain) may be the same variety based on DNA analysis. Global area planted is 2900ha (2010), mostly in France; there has been a large reduction in planted area in France during the past 50 years. It is also grown in Italy (Tuscany and Sardinia), Russia and South Africa. There are at least four wine producers in Australia (Barossa Valley, Hunter Valley and Yarra Valley).

VITICULTURE

Budburst is mid-season and maturity is late. Vigour is high with an erect growth habit. Bunches are medium and well-filled with medium berries. Yield is high. It is reported to

be drought and heat tolerant in France and adapted to a range of soils (but susceptible to drought in South Africa). Spur pruning is used in Australia. It is tolerant of oidium (powdery mildew) but susceptible to downy mildew. Bunches are susceptible to bunch rot. There are at least seven clones available in Australia.

WINE

Clairette is used for both still and sparkling wines that are simple but crisp and suited for early drinking. It is usually picked early to retain freshness. In France, its natural low acidity may be partly overcome by blending with more acidic varieties such as Piquepoul Blanc. Descriptors include fennel, apricot, lime and peach. Wines are said to lack intensity if yield is excessive. Clairette is very prone to oxidation during vinification and 'rancio' wines made with over-ripe grapes were formerly (and perhaps still are) made in France. The sparkling wine Clairette de Die is a blend of Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (75% minimum) and Clairette (25% maximum).

For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (marcel.essling@awri.com.au or 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.